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EASTERN EUROPEAN INTELLIGENCER

16 April 1968

Allied Response to the East German Travel Ban

The Allies in Bonn have drafted a joint statement rejecting the East German travel ban against West German government officials traveling to Berlin. Pending approval from the capitals the Embassy hopes to deliver the statement to the Soviet protocol officer in East Berlin before noon on 17 April.

The statement cites Soviet responsibility for insuring normal functioning of traffic between Berlin and the Federal Republic and points out that the East German decree in no way effects this responsibility. Furthermore, the statement reiterates that the East Germans have "no legal competence" in matters of access between the two points.

The Mission believes, however, that Allied and West German protests are not enough. Viewing the ban as the "most serious move against West Berlin since the 1958-63 crisis," the Mission recommended considering some sort of initial surface probe as soon as possible to be followed by counteraction against the GDR and perhaps restrictions in Interzonal Trade coupled with Allied and possibly NATO action as well.

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Berlin Students Seek Agreement to Block Autobahn Traffic

East German leftist students reportedly have approached the East Germans with a request they be allowed to block Autobahn traffic in the no-man's land between West Berlin and East German checkpoints.

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COMMENT: The students may very well have sought to arrange such a demonstration but it is highly unlikely that the Soviets would readily agree to the idea.

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Yugoslavs Upset Over Arbitrary Hungarian Currency Regulations

A Zagreb paper has attacked the new Hungarian currency regulations which require Yugoslav tourists to convert a minimum of 50 dinars (12.5 dinars=\$1 US) into forints before entering Hungary. The 20 March issue of Vjesnik U Srijedu points out that the new regulations, which took effect on 4 March, are only a stopgap in the battle against black market operations. According to the article, the black market exchange rate is about fifty percent higher in favor of the dinar and the Yugoslavs blame Hungary's "unrealistic exchange rate for dinars" and the high prices for consumer goods in Hungary for creating a favorable atmosphere for black market profiteering. The article also denigrates the value of Hungarian tourism to Yugoslavia, "if the market value of the forint were brought closer to the official value...Hungarian tourists in Yugoslavia would not eat from lunch boxes or spend the night on the open road". The Yugoslavs also charge the Hungarian Foreign Trade Ministry with frustrating attempts at other solutions towards improved border zone cooperation.

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COMMENT: Hungary's action is tantamount to classifying Yugoslavia with capitalist powers whose currency is arbitrarily controlled and exploited. Unlike the forint, the dinar is a semi-hard currency, which presumably has some value for the Hungarians, who have a trade deficit with Yugoslavia, which in 1962 was about 19 million forints.

All is Happy on the Western Border

Radio Prague reported on 13 April that the number of East Germans visiting Czechoslovakia for the Easter holidays was half that of last year while the number of West German visitors doubled. No figures were given, other than South Bohemian border crossing points had handled 4,000 foreign visitors as of noon on the 13th. Most of these presumably came from West Germany and Austria.

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COMMENT: Radio Prague earlier reported that Czechoslovak borders would be open this year to West German tourists who previously entered Czechoslovakia from Austria. According to the Czech news agency, short-term visas would be issued directly at the FRG-CSSR border. The Easter weekend apparently provided the first major opportunity for West Germans to take advantage of these changes.

As of 10 April, Czechoslovak frontier troops continued to remove obstacles, including tank traps, from certain portions of the Czech-West German border. The Czech Frontier Command has announced, however, that old obstacles were being removed because new security devices had been emplaced. The statement frankly concluded that "so far the situation does not permit opening the frontier with the German Federal Republic." The decline in the number of East German visitors to Czechoslovakia, of course, reflects Pankow's restricting private travel to the land of the "fanatical forester."

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